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AUTHOR Yamamoto, Akira Y.; Mathias, Gerald B.
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ABSTRACT

The possibility is suggested that the meanings of words are abstracted far beyond the range of cognitive concept, and that the role words play in the meaning of sentences is similar to the role phonemes play in the meanings of words. The meanings of the various forms are classed into a single paradigm known as the verb "mot-u" which is one of the means for expressing possession in Japanese. These meanings have various levels of abstraction, but they are all more abstract than the concept of possession. The meaning of the word 'possession' may be a universal concept, but even that is one abstracted beyond any possible reference in the real world. A person's possession of a portable object may be physical or legal. Though we may not always be concerned with which is the case, it must always be one or the other. If there is such a concept in any particular language, it is a predicating relationship between a possessor and a possessee. If it can be isolated, it will make it possible to explain the syntax of such expressions in terms of this concept rather than in terms of deep-structure lexical items. (Author/CLK)

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THE SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS OF POSSESSION I: JAPANESE

Akira Y. Yamamoto
University of Kansas

and Gerald B. Mathias
University of Hawaii

0. Prologue: Bendix on Japanese Possession

Bendix (1966) characterizes a minimal definition of the meaning of a form as 'a statement of semantic components that are sufficient to distinguish the meaning paradigmatically from the meanings of all other forms in the language' (p. 2). The definition, therefore, excludes 'any paradigmatic meanings which can be accounted for by means of rules of semantic combination of the form with other forms in the same construction' (p. 2). With this in mind, Bendix approaches three possessive expressions in Japanese which are not entirely unrelated in what they mean. Bendix views a semantic theory to be 'nothing more than a device for determining, for each grammatically analyzed sentence, the set of paraphrases which constitutes its meaning' (Fillmore 1969:49), thus Bendix contrasts the following three constructions in search of the distinctions.

1) i) A-wa B-o moQte-i-ru 'A has B' (perhaps accidentally)
ii) A-wa B-ga ar-u 'A has B inherently'
iii) A-ni(-wa) B-ga ar-u 'A is characterized by (having)B'

Bendix's analysis proceeds in the following manner:

a. all three occur with both abstract and concrete B-nouns,
b. construction i) expresses in general a relation unmarked as to accidentalness or inherence, when concrete B-nouns are usually used,
c. abstract nouns, which as a general group, are derivable from or semantically related to such predicative elements as adjectives and verbs, accord better with that meaning of iii),
d. construction ii), roughly speaking, lies between the two, i.e. i) and iii).

Distinctions of these three constructions are offered by Bendix in the following way:

1') i) A-wa B-o moQte-i-ru 'There is a relation between A and B'
ii) A-wa B-ga ar-u 'There is a relation between A and B,' and 'the relation is inherent'
iii) A-ni(-wa) B-ga ar-u 'A is characterized by B' or 'A is characterized in that there is a relation between A and B'

The distinctions made above include the condition that A is at least

a member of the class of nouns designating human beings and B is at least a member of the class of nouns designating physical objects.

Fillmore (1969) criticizes Bendix, noting that

> 'the concept of "minimal definition" causes Bendix to leave out of his definitions certain features of the meaning of an expression which are redundant within the system, and a tacit acknowledgement of the laws of implication had the effect of allowing him to leave out certain features of the meaning of an expression which are "redundant" in a more formal sense...in that they are logically implied by the terms which have been included' (p. 55).

Bendix recognizes at least two aspects of meaning and he devises semantic tests to distinguish between the criterial and the connotational aspects of meaning. Fillmore, however, proposes that 'there is another aspect of the meaning of an expression in addition to what it asserts and what it implies, and that is what the expression presupposes' (p. 57). Bendix is not, however, totally guilty of this, since he did talk about that part of the meaning which Fillmore would call 'presupposition' by showing what kind of nouns can be used in expressing certain meaning.

Let us suggest that it is possible that the meaning of words are abstracted far beyond the range of cognitive concepts and that the role words play in the meaning of sentences is pretty much the same as the role phonemes play in the meaning of words. We will demonstrate this by examining the expression 1)i) A-wa B-o moQte-i-ru. When we find the abstracted meaning of different parts of the expression of 'possession', we will be able to clearly show what the total expression of 'possession' presupposes and asserts.

2. A-wa B-o moQte-i-ru

We first examine what kind of nouns can show up for B in the -o complement and see what sort of generalization(s) we can make about the nature of the -o complement or the verb, and the combination of the two.

2)	kare-wa he	peN-o pen	moQte-i-ru	'He has a pen.'
3)	kare-wa	ie-o house	moQte-i-ru	'He has a house.'
4)	kare-wa	toti-o land	moQte-i-ru	'He has a (piece of) land.'
5)	kare-wa	sigoto-o job	moQte-i-ru	'He has a job.'

6) kare-wa kitai-o moQte-i-ru
he expectation 'He has an expectation.'

7)*kare-wa kodomo-o moQte-i-ru
child

8)*kare-wa tomodati-o moQte-i-ru
friend

9)*kare-wa hana-o moQte-i-ru
nose

From sentences 2) - 9), we can see that the generalization made by Bendix about B-nouns does not capture the facts. Sentences 2) - 4) exemplify that the verb moQte-i-ru can co-occur with those nouns which we may tentatively call 'concrete nouns'. Sentences 5) and 6) include non-concrete nouns. Sentences 7) - 9) show that the verb moQte-i-ru cannot occur with at least some relational nouns or body-part nouns. At this stage we may generalize these facts simply by saying that the verb phrase which includes moQte-i-ru can make sense when the -o complement is not a relational noun or a body-part noun. Now observe:

10) inu-wa hone-o moQte-i-ru
dog bone 'The dog has a bone.'

11) usi-wa magusa-o moQte-i-ru
cow hay 'The cow has (some) hay.'

12)*ie-wa motinusi-o moQte-i-ru
house owner

13)*razio-wa aNtena-o moQte-i-ru
radio antenna

14)*kitai-wa situboo-o moQte-i-ru
expecta- dissapoint-
tion ment

The above group of sentences simply shows that the nouns appearing in place of A must be characterized by ANIMATE.[1]

2) kare-wa peN-o moQte-i-ru 'He has a pen.'

15) a) doko-ni peN-o moQte-i-ru ka
where-at pen Q 'Where does he have a pen?'

b) kata-kara sagete-i-ru kabaN-no
shoulder-from hang bag-of

naka-ni peN-o moQte-i-ru
inside-in pen 'He has a pen in the bag which he is hanging on his shoulder.'

c) kare-no uti-ni peN-o moQte-i-ru
he-of home-at pen-obj 'He has a pen at home.'

To the question 15)a) "where?", we are likely to get some sentence like 15)b) or c). When 15)b) is the answer, it permits the listener to interpret that the pen is with him, while 15)c) allows him to interpret that it is not with him. This bit of evidence shows us that the verb moQte-i-ru alone certainly does not contain any presupposition nor assertion of the pen's existence at any particular location, i.e. the verb moQte-i-ru alone does not presuppose nor assert the semantic feature of EXISTENTIAL. Even when the -o complement is taken into consideration, the sentence is still indeterminant as to the feature EXISTENTIAL. The nouns in the -o complement in this paradigm include hoN 'book', tokei 'a watch', terebi 'television', etc.

3) kare-wa ie-o moQte-i-ru 'He has a house.'

16) a) doko-ni ie-o moQte-i-ru ka
where-at house-obj Q 'Where does he have a house?'

b)*no equivalent answer to 15)b)

c) kare-wa nihoN-ni ie-o moQte-i-ru 'He has a house in Japan.'
he Japan-at

The nouns in the -o complement in this paradigm include toti 'land', yama 'mountain', noozyoo 'farm', kooba 'factory', etc. Since we can not find any answer equivalent to 15)b), i.e. EXISTENTIAL in the sense of having something <u>with</u> oneself, we may conclude that the -o complement and moQte-i-ru in this paradigm permit us to interpret the expression as "A has B, but B is not with/on A."

We do not want to say, however, as briefly mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, that there are two kinds of moQte-i-ru, one with the meaning "A has B, and B is on A" and the other "A has B, and B is not on A". We rather state that the content of the -o complement contributes to some extent to bring out and explicate the meaning which is part of the meaning of POSSESSION. We take the term POSSESSION to be quite broad and vague in its meaning, and in the following we will try to specify <u>when</u> we find <u>what</u> <u>kind</u> of specific interpretations out of POSSESSION.

2. Specification of interpretations

The nouns in the second group, namely, ie 'house', toti 'land', yama 'mountain', etc. can be generalized as being 'one's property' or as having the feature TITLEABLE. Observe the following:

17) kare-wa ie-o moQte-i-ru,*sikasi sore-wa kare-no-de nai
but that he-of-BE not

When some noun with only TITLEABLE and not PORTABLE, such as ie 'house', shows up with the verb moQte-i-ru, the interpretation of the VP is OWN, that is, "A has the title to B" or "A owns B". Therefore, we can not say "He has a house, but it is not his" as in sensence 17).

As shown before, in sentences 15)a) - c), the B nouns may refer to some physical objects which can be carried around. We give to nouns of the sort the semantic feature PORTABLE, rather than EXISTENTIAL. When a noun marked with PORTABLE is the -o complement of the verb moQte-i-ru, the interpretation is "A has B, and A can temporarily do whatever A wants to do with B". We will tentatively say that such verb phrases have the interpreted semantic feature PORTS.

18) kare-wa peN-o moQte-i-ru ga, sore-wa kare-no-de nai
he pen but that he-of-BE not
'He has a pen, but it is not his.'

The possibility of a PORTS interpretation, however, does not necessarily preclude one of ownership:

19) kare-wa peN-o moQte-i-ru ga, sore-wa taniN-no-de na-ku
he pen but that other-of-BE not

kare-no da
he-of BE
'He has a pen, and it is not anyone else's but his.'

When an OWNS interpretation is forced, as in 19), the PORTS interpretation is nullified. Thus either 20)a) or 20)b) can follow 19).

20) a) sosite ima kare-ga sore-o tukaQte-i-ru
and now he-subj that-obj use
'and he is using it now.'

b) demo, ima kare-no imooto-ga sore-o tukaQte-i-ru
but now he-of sister-subj that-obj use
'but his sister is using it now.'

Summarizing the discussion so far, we may state that the group of nouns to which 16)b) applies are marked with TITLEABLE but not with PORTABLE. Therefore, the interpretation of sentence 3)

3) kare-wa ie-o moQte-i-ru

is unambiguously "kare (he) has the title to ie (house)," i.e. "he owns the house, and he does not have it on him". On the other hand, the other group of nouns are marked with both TITLEABLE and PORTABLE.

The interpretation, therefore, is indeterminant as to "A owns B" or "A has B on him for his disposal", since no clue is given to choose TITLEABLE or PORTABLE. In other words, we cannot give any specific reading other than a very general POSSESSION to a sentence like 2)

2) kare-wa peN-o moQte-i-ru.

This is not equivalent to saying nouns like peN 'pen', hoN 'book', terebi 'television', etc. are not marked with TITLEABLE and PORTABLE, simply because additional information can make it explicit whether OWNS is more appropriate or PORTS is more appropriate. So the feature that was referred to as EXISTENTIAL (i.e. be at a location) is redundant for Japanese and need not be specified. Now observe:

6) kare-wa kitai-o moQte-i-ru 'He has an expectation.'

Sentence 6) does not fit either in the ie-group or the peN-group of paradigms as is obvious from the content of the noun in the -o complement. The nouns of the ie- and the peN-groups are some physical objects. Kitai 'expectation', on the other hand, cannot be given the feature CONCRETE, but we hesitate to generalize the kitai-group of nouns as ABSTRACT nouns. Observe:

21) a) kare-wa zyoonetu-o moQte-i-ru
zeal 'He has zeal.'

b) kare-wa yaboo-o moQte-i-ru
ambition 'He has ambition.'

c) kare-wa zisiN-o moQte-i-ru
confidence 'He has confidence.'

d)*kare-wa koNnaN-o moQte-i-ru
difficulty

e)*kare-wa yorokobi-o moQte-i-ru
joy

f)*kare-wa sihoNsyugi-o moQte-i-ru
capitalism

It appears that the nouns showing up in this paradigm are a subset of ABSTRACT nouns, and not all ABSTRACT nouns occurring in this paradigm can be interpreted appropriately. This subset of ABSTRACT nouns is tentatively referred to as having the semantic feature of MENTAL ATTRIBUTE.[2]

22) kare-wa kitai-o moQte-i-ru ga,

a)**sore-wa uti-ni ar-u
that home be

b)**sore-wa kare-no-de nai
that he-of-BE not

When the noun in the -o complement is marked with MENTAL ATTRIBUTE, it is absurd to discuss TITLEABLE or PORTABLE. These features are simply irrelevant here. Then, in this case, the interpretation is always 'A is characterized by having B', which Bendix attributed to the structure A-ni B-ga ar-u. Sentence 5) seems to be most troublesome in our present analysis.

5) kare-wa sigoto-o moQte-i-ru 'He has a job.'

Observe sentence 5) which is followed by some additional information:

23) kare-wa sigoto-o moQte-i-ru

a) demo, sore-wa nihoN-ni ar-u
but that Japan-at be 'but that is in Japan.'

b)*demo, sore-wa kare-no-de nai
but that he-of-BE not

This seems to indicate that the noun sigoto 'job' belongs to the ie-group of nouns in that "he" has the TITLE to the job. The interpretation may be: 'he has a job somewhere in Japan and the job can be executed only in that particular place'. But observe:

24) kare-wa sigoto-o moQte-i-ru

a)*demo, sore-wa nihoN-ni ar-u

b) demo, sore-wa kare-no-de nai
but that he-of-Be not 'but that is not his.'

Sentences 24) show that the noun sigoto 'job' belongs to the peN-group of nouns in that he may be carrying it on him. The sigoto in this case is interpreted as: 'he has papers to grade, a set of encyclopedia to sell, etc.'.

We also find a third case which is hard to exemplify:

25) kare-wa sigoto-o moQte-i-ru. sunawati, namely

a) kare-wa kaisya-no syatyoo da
company-of president BE 'he is the president of a company.'

b) kare-wa daigaku-no seNsee da
university-of teacher BE 'he is a professor of a university.'

In this case, kare 'he' is characterized as being president of a company or a professor of a university, and he cannot be dissociated with these roles. Then, is the noun sigoto polysemous? We believe that such nouns as sigoto are more indeterminant than other kinds of nouns, and nouns in this group are marked with some feature more abstract than TITLEABLE, PORTABLE, etc., but which, in conjunction with other features in the context, have one of those interpretations.

3. Summary

The verb moQte-i-ru is quite abstract in its meaning and does not itself assert ownership, disposability, existentialness, etc. We can assign a semantic feature POSSESSION to this verb. In this respect we can include all other verbs which have something to do with gaining such as kaw- 'to buy', tor- 'to take', e- 'to obtain', hirow- 'to pick up', uke- 'to receive', kaw- 'to raise', etc.; or losing such as usinaw- 'to lose', nakus- 'to lose', ur- 'to sell', sute- 'to discard', otos- 'to drop', etc.

Nouns in the -o complement can be assigned to four classes at this stage of investigation:

1. nouns with a feature TITLEABLE
2. nouns with features TITLEABLE, PORTABLE
3. nouns with a feature MENTAL ATTRIBUTE
4. nouns with a feature more abstract than TITLEABLE, PORTABLE, and MENTAL ATTRIBUTE

The feature TITLEABLE is redundantly LEGAL POSSESSION and PORTABLE is redundantly PHYSICAL POSSESSION.

If there is such a concept as POSSESSION in any particular language, it is a predicating relationship between a possessor and a possessee. If the concept can be isolated as we have tried above, then, it will make it possible to explain the syntax of such expressions in terms of this concept rather than in terms of deep-structure lexical items.

Chomsky (1965:114-115) has pointed out that the selection of a subject noun cannot be made dependent on features of the object nouns, but he does not at that point offer a solution to the problem that for virtually every verb with more than one complement it is possible to find combinations of individually acceptable noun phrase complements which conflict with each other. For example, sentence 26) is virtually impossible to accept as a serious statement of opinion:

26) Sincerity may frighten the fish.

Part of sentence 26) is associated with a presupposition which another part ordinarily contradicts. We state that the part "may frighten the fish" involves a presupposition that the subject of frighten is something perceptible to fish. That is, we have posited much more abstract features than traditionally given to the meaning of verbs. These abstract features may or may not be interpreted at the next higher node where the verb meets complement. If the interpretation is possible, a new feature is added, and thenceforth posited interpretive features which select the next complement at each successive node.

NOTES

1. This is actually an over-generalization. The kind and number of ANIMATE nouns appearing in place of A are dependent on the interpreted semantic features at a node where the -o complement and the verb meet plus, of course, each constituent's semantic features.

10') inu-wa omotya-o moQte-i-ru
dog toy

11')*usi-wa hone-o moQte-i-ru
cow bone

When sentence 10') is forced on us, the whole sentence presupposes that the inu 'dog' is owned by some dog-lover who is known to have treated the dog as if it is his own 'human' child. Ordinarily, however, the interpretation is not probable. Similarly, sentence 11') is not interpretable. This bit of information shows us that in order for a sentence to be interpretable non-human animate nouns in -wa complement must be known to be 'associated with nouns in -o complement' or to be 'characterized by nouns in -o complement'.

2. The classification of ABSTRACT nouns into subsets is not a simple matter. The subset of nouns under discussion (i.e. nouns with MENTAL ATTRIBUTE) seems to be limited to those which appear in the -o complement in the frame X-o idaite-i-ru 'harbor/bear/hold X'. That is, the semantic features at the node where the noun in the -o complement and the verb meet must include 'volition', 'self-determination' or 'self-created MENTAL ATTRIBUTE'. For example, sentences 22')a) - d) are good sentences but e) - h) are not.

22') a) kare-wa akui-o idaite-i-ru
ill will 'He bears ill will.'

b) kare-wa tekii-o idaite-i-ru
enmity 'He harbors enmity.'

c) kare-wa zeNi-o idaite-i-ru
good will 'He has good will.'

d) kare-wa kookaN-o idaite-i-ru
good feelings 'He has good feelings.'

e)*kare-wa ziyuu-o idaite-i-ru
freedom

f)*kare-wa kurusimi-o idaite-i-ru
agony

g)*kare-wa kiki-o idaite-i-ru
danger

h)*kare-wa kyooryokusei-o moQte-i-ru
cooperativeness

An interesting fact is that sentence i) is good but sentence j) is not.

i) i) kare-wa kiboo-o idaite-i-tu
hope 'He has (some) hope.'

ii) kare-wa kiboo-o moQte-i-ru
hope 'He has (some) hope.'

j) i)*kare-wa situboo-o idaite-i-ru
disappointment

ii)*kare-wa situboo-o moQte-i-ru

Both kiboo 'hope' and situboo 'disappointment' appear, at first, to belong to a same class, but the former can be held in one's mind irrespective of his environment. The latter feeling, on the other hand, must have some outer reason or cause so that one feels 'disappointed'. For this class of ABSTRACT nouns we need further investigation. To illustrate some of the problems, we can cite a few deviant cases:

k) i)*kare-wa soozooryoku-o idaite-i-ru
imagination

ii) kare-wa soozooryoku-o moQte-i-ru 'He has imagination.'

l) i)*kare-wa dokusyo-yoku-o idaite-i-ru
reading-desire

ii) kare-wa dokusyo-yoku-o moQte-i-ru 'He has reading-desire.'

m) i) kare-wa kanasimi-o idaite-i-ru
sadness 'He bears sadness.'

ii)*kare-wa kanasimi-o moQte-i-ru

n) i) kare-wa yuuzyoo-o idaite-i-ru
friendship 'He has friendship.'

ii)*kare-wa yuuzyoo-o moQte-i-ru

o) i) kare-wa keNo-o idaite-i-ru
hate 'He has hatred.'

ii)*kare-wa keNo-o moQte-i-ru

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